

USAF has launched a sweeping overhaul of its personnel system.

Curtain Up on "FORCE DEVELOP

By Bruce D. Callander

A few years ago, Air Force leaders began questioning whether the service's current education and training approach—the process used to groom individuals for increased responsibility—amounted to little more than helping members “fill the right squares” on their service records. They discovered, unfortunately, that while the approach might improve promotion chances, it did not necessarily make individuals more productive on the job or materially advance their overall careers.

To remedy the situation, the Air Force has embarked on a sweeping overhaul of its personnel system. It has dubbed the new approach “Force Development.”

In announcing the initiative, Gen. John P. Jumper, Air Force Chief of Staff, said it not only will tie training and education more closely to an individual's career development but also tailor assignments and other personnel actions toward the same end.

“As we transformed our Cold War structure into an Air and Space Expeditionary Force, it follows that we should transition the way we train, educate, promote, and assign our

Total Force,” said Jumper. Force Development applies equally to active duty officer and enlisted, reserve components, and civilians—across all specialties—“whether at home or in a tent city, on the flight line or the launchpad, in the air or in the lab,” he added.

The new undertaking is being applied first to officers, but the Air Force already is working on a parallel program for civilian employees and beginning a similar overhaul for enlisted members and the reserve forces. The service expects to apply the approach to the whole force within the next year.

The Custom Fit

The Force Development goal is to “move away from a one-size-fits-all approach,” said Brig. Gen. Richard S. Hassan, director of USAF's Senior Leader Management Office and point man on many of the changes. He said the Air Force recognizes that each individual's career consists of a number of experiences and those experiences are not necessarily the same for all members. The goal is to match those experiences closer to the needs of the individual and the service.

TSgt. Kenneth Allbrooks, with the 363rd Expeditionary Services Squadron Education Office, assists TSgt. Scott West in signing up for a test. USAF has embarked on a program that leaders hope will better link education and training to an individual's career.

MENT

“We want to do what makes sense for both the service and the individual,” said Hassan.

He continued, “If you understand the needs of the Air Force and you understand what people like to do in career development, why can’t we marry that up better by matching education and training opportunities more to the individual career as opposed to saying, again, one size fits all?”

For example, Hassan said that to become competent as a pilot, there is a standard set of functional experiences the pilot must go through. “We understand that pretty well,” he said. “I call that ‘occupational competence.’ The other piece of the equation is what education and training opportunities we offer. Our terminology is that they are the ‘enduring competencies.’ So the key is how to tie all of that together in a way that makes sense.”

One way the service plans to do that is to redirect its approach to Professional Military Education. “We want to stop thinking about one op-

portunity for everybody, which is what we do today in PME,” said Hassan.

The Intermediate Service Schools level, such as Air Command and Staff College, provides a good illustration of the problem, said Hassan. Under the old system, USAF simply selected a certain number of people to go to ACSC or some other service equivalent. “That doesn’t really meet the future needs of the Air Force nor does it meet what the individuals may need,” he said.

Hassan said the service asked the most recent ISS selection board to act not just as a PME selection board but as an educational development board. “That can mean we have a certain number of people we want to send to PME, a certain number we want to get advanced academic degrees, a certain number we want to send to some fellowship programs, and a certain number of people, say in the acquisition world, that we want to send to some education-with-industry program,” he explained.

Connecting individuals more closely with their career development should



USAF photo by SSgt. Timothy Cook



In a revamp of Air Command and Staff College, officers, such as this pilot, will concentrate on one of a group of occupational skills during the last portion. That skill will help determine the pilot's next duty assignment.

make the Air Force stronger, said Hassan. "The engineer who goes to Stanford to get his engineering master's or Ph.D. likes that," he added. "It makes that individual a lot more competent and credible within his career field."

This does not mean all members will follow separate routes throughout their training, Hassan said. Rather, they will take some blocks of training together and then branch into different channels.

First Up

The service plans to change ACSC into three modules. "Module 1 will be called Leadership and Joint Development and focus on things we hold dear such as doctrine, strategy, and leadership principles," said Hassan. The module probably would be from 10 to 16 weeks long. "Everybody would take that part so they're all grounded in the same thing," he added.

Module 2 would focus on the operational art of war. ACSC is the intermediate level of PME and it's there that individuals should shift their focus from the tactical to the operational and staff issues. It helps the individual, said Hassan, transition beyond the wing level. The module would be about three months long. With Module 1, a student would have completed approximately the first six months of the normal ACSC 10-month cycle.

"Module 3 is the really unique part of the new approach," said

Hassan. "The training will be related to what I call a satellite group of occupational skills." For example, he said a fighter pilot generally will concentrate on one of five occupational areas: acquisition, plans and programs, politico-military, space, and a "sort of superoperations area." Whichever skill the pilot chooses will be the deciding factor in the pilot's next duty assignment. In the past, the Air Force simply would

project a post-ACSC assignment based on whatever job might be open. Module 3, in effect, said Hassan, will help prepare an individual for his or her next duty assignment.

He noted that the service may conduct additional training for a particular occupational skill at Maxwell AFB, Ala., the home of ACSC, or elsewhere. For instance, Hassan said that if the Air Mobility Warfare Center has the premier mobility operations course, "we might take the five or 10 or 15 people who are going through mobility ops as their connected skill and send them to [the center] for 10 weeks."

The Air Force has also made evolutionary improvements in some of its training programs largely to accommodate a smaller, more scattered force. Much of this effort exploits modern technology, and it is not without its problems.

Making the Connection

"In a generic sense, I would say that access to courses has improved for deployed members," said Jim Sweizer, chief of Air Force's Voluntary Education Branch, which monitors off-duty study programs. He said that USAF has established some learning centers overseas, especially in Saudi Arabia, where service members can take required tests

Everyone Should Be an Instructor

As part of its new approach to education and training, Air Force leaders want to make becoming an instructor a more acceptable choice for service members.

"Each of us who makes the Air Force a career is obliged to invest some part of that career in training or educating the airmen who will take our place," said Gen. John P. Jumper, Air Force Chief of Staff, when he announced the service's new Force Development initiative.

Service leaders believe the Air Force no longer has a representative set of skills within its instructor force. "We need to commit resources so that people want to instruct and we send our best and brightest to train our youngest, the people who are going to replace us," said Brig. Gen. Richard S. Hassan, director of USAF's Senior Leader Management Office.

"In the other services, it's considered important for people to have been instructors at academies or recruiters or things that we in the Air Force, for whatever reason, have not held dear," he explained.

The Air Force must develop a system to support its instructors, he said. More importantly, "we, as individuals, have to rethink how we view them, because, today, most people don't view such assignments as something they need to do," emphasized Hassan. "We have to make everybody think about [instructing] being a duty, to leave the legacy to the youth."

and where there are computer labs to help them.

"The biggest issue with trying to get this information over to deployed folks in an electronic format is connectivity," Sweizer said, adding, "That's a big problem when you're in somebody else's country." He noted, too, that the cost is high in many countries.

"I think we're meeting the needs of those people who are going over and doing a better job of counseling them before they depart," said Sweizer. "There is nothing to prevent them from signing up for a course in a distance learning format, be that computer-based training or Internet Web-based courses, before they leave. Depending on the length of deployment, we can get them into a quick course or something that they can start and continue when they get back."

The Air Force increasingly is turning to the electronic world for in-house training efforts. "Our main goal is to leverage technology so that we can meet the warfighter's needs anytime, anywhere," said Maj. Buster McCall, chief of Advanced Distributed Learning. "Right now, all enlisted and officer PME levels offer courses via Advanced Distributed Learning."

Currently, more than 53,000 student per year participate in distributed learning courses, the majority of which are in 100 percent ADL format, said McCall. "Almost 11,000 officers are enrolled each year in intermediate and senior service pro-



USAF photo by TSgt. David D. Underwood

A college field representative assists A1C Robyn Dorocak, 86th Airlift Wing, Ramstein AB, Germany. Surveys show that education and training are major incentives in the service's ability to retain personnel.

grams and complete a part of their programs using CD-ROM products," he added.

Beyond serving as a career development tool, Air Force officials are well aware that education and training play a major role in recruiting and retention. Sweizer said the service has documentation from 1996 through 2000 that shows that continuing their education is the No. 1 reason persons joined the Air Force.

When airmen in Basic Military Training are asked why they enlisted, he said, "for the most part, 'continuing education on active duty' is the

No. 1 reason." The No. 2 and 3 spots fluctuate between "training in a skill" and "a secure job," he added.

Surveys also show that education and training are major factors in the decision to remain in service, particularly for enlisted members. Officers, who must have at least one degree before they are commissioned, less often list these as top reasons for staying, but they still count them high among the favorable influences.

Congress has provided several education incentives to enhance military recruiting and retention efforts. For example, the Tuition Assistance Program, which allows service members to work toward college degrees while still on active duty, recently received a boost. Last October, the government began paying full tuition and mandatory fees up to \$250 per semester hour or a maximum of \$4,500 per year. The previous rate had been only 75 percent of tuition, with a \$3,500 ceiling.

Expand the GI Bill?

In the past two years, Congress also increased the benefits paid under the Montgomery GI Bill by some 46 percent. Last year alone, the benefits rose to \$900 per month and will rise to \$985 in October 2003 for veterans who served at least three years and are enrolled in full-time study. Service members contribute a portion of their pay to an education fund to be able to participate in the GI Bill.

There is also a push in Congress to



USAF photo by TSgt. Jim Varhegyi

TSgt. Rick Seward, 317th Recruiting Squadron, checks out the data collection functions on a Raptor mobile recruiting office. Educational benefits are the chief reason individuals join USAF.



As the Air Force implements its new Force Development program, it also must balance competing personnel issues, such as a proposal to boost the GI Bill—it might aid recruiting efforts but could negatively impact retention.

increase benefits further, essentially taking the GI Bill back to its World War II status. According to Darryl Kehrer, staff director for the benefits subcommittee of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, in today's environment a veteran attending a public, four-year institution as a commuter student would need a monthly allowance of \$1,409.

"We talk about the all-volunteer force, but we all know what it is—it's an all-recruited force," he told a conference last summer. Returning to the post-World War II-era GI Bill would send a message to the youth of America and to "middle-class parents who are priced out of student aid programs."

Conversely, while services tout the GI Bill in recruiting ads, military officials worry that making the program too generous could work against retention efforts. They are concerned that the new push to boost the GI Bill could serve as a reverse incentive to making the service a career.

"Measured increases such as going from \$800 to \$900 or \$985 are a good thing," said Sweizer, "but I would be remiss if I said that we weren't concerned about some of these proposed increases, where they want to go to anywhere from \$1,300 per month to actually paying for full education and maybe giving a nice stipend along with it."

He said that "kind of carrot ... could serve as an incentive to leave."

Ideally, officials would like more

members to use training and education opportunities available to them while in the service as a foundation they would build upon after they serve a full career. One of the best methods for doing that for enlisted members, said Sweizer, is the Community College of the Air Force.

On average, an airman will spend about 12 years to earn a CCAF degree. Spending that length of time in the service virtually guarantees the airman will make the Air Force a career, staying for at least 20 years.

CCAF gives airmen credit for technical training they receive in the Air Force and allows them to add to those credits with off-duty study that can lead to an associate degree. Later, many graduates use their credits to enter four-year colleges to earn bachelor's degrees. However, some people charge that CCAF credits are not accepted at face value by many civilian institutions. Sweizer argues that "CCAF is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools."

He emphasized, though, that some students may have trouble transferring highly technical credits. "That's something that any student will run into," said Sweizer. For example, he said that CCAF offers an associate of applied science—a technology-based

degree that derives largely from technical training gained in the Air Force. It will be unlikely that an airman could transfer those technical training credits directly into a liberal arts or history degree program. "After all," he asked, "how many places have a bachelor's degree in avionics systems technology?"

On the other hand, there are many civilian institutions that have partnered with the Air Force for years, said Sweizer. Some accept all credits from CCAF degrees. He noted that USAF education counselors advise airmen "of the pitfalls in transferring technical types of credit and that they may have to do a little more work to get a nontechnical type degree."

Overall, officials say, USAF education and training programs are healthy and growing. However, they maintain that new approaches may be needed to expand opportunities for a force that is smaller and yet called on to do more.

As the Air Force becomes a smaller, more deployed force, "we have to do a better job of using technology to help our people no matter where they are," said Sweizer. One of those new measures, he said, is a Web-based progress report developed by CCAF to show airmen specifically what courses they still need to complete their degree requirements. They don't have to go through an education office to keep up-to-date. Another effort involved developing a virtual education center to let individuals enroll from their work places or from home, request tuition assistance, and do other types of educational processing.

On the new Force Development initiative, Hassan cautioned that the service will need to work its way into change, especially with the rated force, where there has been such pressure to fill cockpits.

He emphasized, though, that the initiative works within the Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept. "The module idea may offer even more flexibility in determining when people go on and off deployment," he added. "Actually, we may be able to accommodate some people that we might not have in the past." ■

Bruce D. Callander is a contributing editor of Air Force Magazine. He served tours of active duty during World War II and the Korean War and was editor of Air Force Times from 1972 to 1986. His most recent article for Air Force Magazine, "The Subtle Art of Evaluation," appeared in the December 2002 issue.